

Do our automated unconscious behaviors reveal our real selves and hidden truths about the universe? -- A review of David Hawkins 'Power vs Force--the hidden determinants of human behavior –author's official authoritative edition' 412p (2012)(original edition 1995)(review revised 2019)

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ABSTRACT

I am very used to strange books and special people, but Hawkins stands out due to his use of a simple technique for testing muscle tension as a key to the “truth” of any kind of statement whatsoever—i.e., not just to whether the person being tested believes it, but whether it is really true! What is well known is that people will show automatic, unconscious physiological and psychological responses to just about anything they are exposed to—images, sounds, touch, odors, ideas, people. So, muscle reading to find out their true feelings is not radical at all, unlike using it as a dousing stick (more muscle reading) to do “paranormal science”.

Hawkins describes the use of decreasing tension in the muscles of an arm in response to increases in cognitive load thus causing the arm to drop in response to the constant pressure of someone's fingers. He seems unaware that there is a long established and vast ongoing research effort in social psychology referred to by such phrases as ‘implicit cognition’, ‘automaticity’ etc., and that his use of ‘kinesiology’ is one tiny section. In addition to muscle tone (infrequently used) social psychologists measure EEG, galvanic skin response and most frequently verbal responses to words, sentences, images or situations at times varying from seconds to months after the stimulus. Many, such as Bargh and Wegner, take the results to mean we are automatons who learn and act largely without awareness via S1 (automated System 1) and many others such as Kihlstrom and Shanks say these studies are flawed and we are creatures of S2 (deliberative System 2). Though Hawkins seems to have no idea, as in other areas of the descriptive psychology of higher order thought, the situation regarding “automaticity” is still as chaotic as it was when Wittgenstein described the reasons for the sterility and barrenness of psychology in the 30's. Nevertheless, this book is an easy read and some therapists and spiritual teachers may find it of use.

Those wishing a comprehensive up to date framework for human behavior from the modern two systems view may consult my book 'The Logical Structure of Philosophy, Psychology, Mind and Language in Ludwig Wittgenstein and John Searle' 2nd ed (2019). Those interested in more of my writings may see 'Talking Monkeys--Philosophy, Psychology, Science, Religion and Politics on a Doomed Planet--Articles and Reviews 2006-2019 3rd ed (2019) and Suicidal Utopian Delusions in the 21st Century 4th ed (2019)

I am very used to strange books and special people, but Hawkins stands out due to his use of a simple technique for testing muscle tension as a key to the "truth" of any kind of statement whatsoever—i.e., not just to whether the person being tested believes it but, whether it is really true! How could any sane person believe this? As a person with over 50 years adult experience with science, psychology, philosophy, religion and life I do not find it at all credible that it is even highly reliable about the person's beliefs and there is no chance of getting to know reality this way. What is well known is that people will show automatic, unconscious physiological and psychological responses to just about anything they are exposed to—images, sounds, touch, odors, ideas, people. So, muscle reading to find out their true feelings is not radical at all, unlike using it as a dousing stick (more muscle reading) to do "paranormal science".

Kinesiology, also known as human kinetics, is the study of human movement. Kinesiology studies physiological, mechanical (muscle tone), and psychological mechanisms as indices of people's mental and physical status and often uses movement exercises as therapy. However, Hawkins (without saying so) is using the term to refer to a very narrow application of kinesiology—the use of decreasing tension in the muscles of an arm in response to increases in cognitive load (i.e., mention of some person, event or object), which causes the subject to be distracted by intellectual or emotional issues, thus decreasing the muscle tension and causing the arm to drop in response to the constant pressure of someone's fingers. Hawkins seems unaware that there is a long established and vast ongoing research effort in social psychology referred to by such phrases as 'implicit cognition', 'automaticity' etc., and that his use of 'kinesiology' is one tiny section. In addition to muscle tone (actually infrequently used) social psychologists measure EEG, galvanic skin response and most frequently verbal responses to words, sentences, images or situations at times varying from seconds to months after the stimulus.

It was just by chance that I read Hawkins book after reading several books and dozens of recent papers on implicit cognition and was greatly surprised that he uses it as a key to the universe--i.e., the 'ultimate nature of reality' and I am sure the hundreds of active researchers would be equally amazed. I relate his spiritual practice to contemporary work on implicit cognition.

A major issue in most contemporary research on implicit social cognition is the degree to which it is automatic ('unconscious') and what constitutes 'evidence' for this. Hundreds of papers and dozens of books have appeared in just the last few years with massive confusion and often acrimonious debates. Many, such as Bargh and Wegner, take the results to mean we are automatons who learn and act largely without awareness via S1 and many others such as Kihlstrom and Shanks say these studies are flawed and we are creatures of S2.

Though Hawkins seems to have no idea, as in other areas of the descriptive psychology of higher order thought, the situation regarding "automaticity" is still as chaotic as it was when Wittgenstein described the reasons for the sterility and barrenness of psychology in the 30's.

Often the issue is stated by researchers and philosophers in terms of System 1 and System 2 functioning --a very useful, even indispensable division of behavior (intentionality) into our primitive reptilian automated, nonreflective S1 and our higher cortical primate conscious deliberative functions of S2. As noted in my other reviews, this division was pioneered by philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein in the 1930's, though nobody has realized it.

I am quite familiar with meditation and the phenomena of enlightenment (see my review of Adi Da's autobiography 'The Knee of Listening') and am willing to accept Hawkins' claim to be in this rarefied group (it is often said that we know of less than 1000 enlightened persons in all of human history). I can also accept that he may have been a very effective 'therapist' who helped many persons and clearly, he is highly intelligent. This does not make me accept his many questionable or clearly false statements about the facts of the world. I am also (on the basis of a lifetime of study of science and philosophy) very skeptical about the relevance of chaos, attractors, complexity theory, computation, etc. to the study of human behavior (see my reviews and books on academia.edu, philpapers.org, researchgate.net, vixra.org, libgen.io, b-ok.org, Amazon etc.), claims which are often made by scientists as well. Implicit cognition research involves the usual horrific mixing of factual true or false scientific issues about causal brain functions (the S1 mind), with

those about how language works (i.e., the mind, which as Wittgenstein showed us $\frac{3}{4}$ of a century ago, is public behavior --the S2 mind)—other topics I have covered extensively in my reviews.

So, Hawkins makes much of his muscle reading and I'm sure it often works well but there is a major logical error here. Regardless of what it says about the beliefs of the person being tested, it clearly says nothing whatever about the world itself. So, I respect Hawkins and his therapeutic work but, with the vast array of approaches to spiritual and emotional healing, there are lots of choices. And it is one thing to be treated by an enlightened master-whose very presence (or even the thought of them) can be galvanizing, and quite another to be treated by an ordinary person. By far the best source of books, audios and videos of an enlightened master at work are those of Osho (Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh) which are available to buy or free on the net on various sites. He therapized thousands at a time on occasion and created the most remarkable therapeutic community of all time around him. Though he is gone, his therapists still practice worldwide, and his works can be transformative.

Hawkins has other books which have many favorable reviews so those deeply interested may consult them.